

## THE BURNING OF THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE

*“Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire:  
and all our pleasant things are laid waste.”*

*Isaiah 64:11*

SO might the younger generation of the worshippers at the world famous Tabernacle say, and probably have said, at the memory of the magnificent church edifice as it was, and at the sight of what it is now, when little more than the four walls of the noble structure remain. In an hour or so, the direful work of destruction was accomplished.

Having occasion to make a few calls in the city, the writer did not reach the college until twelve o'clock. After resting awhile, he was preparing to join the conference, then sitting, when a young woman gave the alarm, “The Tabernacle is on fire!” Hastening out, he saw flames proceeding from two of the top windows at the S.E. corner of the building. The flames spread rapidly, and in little more than half an hour the whole of the interior, including the roof, was ablaze.

The vast amount of pitch pine, of which the seats were constructed, and the inside casing of the walls of deal, for acoustic purposes, furnished ample fuel for the flames, and the firemen soon saw that to attempt to save the interior of the building would be useless, so their efforts were directed to preserve the walls, and if possible, to prevent the fire from spreading. Happily these ends were secured, and by two o'clock all danger of the spread of the conflagration was over, and the flames in the vast building were extinguished, and the more than thirty fire engines were preparing to return whence they came.

At the time of the first alarm, the conference was listening to an able paper by Rev. James Stephens, M.A., who has been recently lecturing at the college. The President, Pastor T. Spurgeon, hoping that it would be only a small affair, resolved to continue the sitting, manifesting great presence of mind, but it was soon found to be impossible to proceed, and after a suitable prayer and the doxology, the five or six hundred men, and the ladies in the gallery, quietly, and without the least panic, descended to the scene below.

All through the trying scene, the Pastor and President was wonderfully calm and self-possessed, being upheld by the consciousness that he and all the interests of the church, and its many agencies, are in the hands of God, that “The Lord reigneth,” and that “all things work together for good to them that love God.”

The tables had been laid for the ministers' dinner in the school room in the basement, and preparations were being made for the Subscribers' Meeting and the Annual Supper in the evening in the lecture hall, but other claims than those of appetite engaged the energies of all, and thus the more important of the books, as also the valuable portraits of former pastors, were conveyed in safety to the college.

Readers of “*From the Usher's Desk to the Tabernacle Pulpit*” will hardly need to be reminded that a false alarm of “Fire,” while Mr. Spurgeon was preaching at the Surrey Music Hall, in 1856, resulted in a panic which caused the death of seven persons and serious injury to twenty-eight others. This was a terrible ordeal for the then young pastor. But no such catastrophe occurred at the Tabernacle.

Before we proceed to describe the great building as it is, we may briefly refer to it as it was. The first great meeting, to inaugurate the scheme for a large and permanent home for the church, was held in October, 1856. For more than three years, Mr. Spurgeon visited all parts of England and Scotland, dividing the collections between local claims and his own great undertaking. Large sums were given by rich friends, one subscriber giving £5,000, and the poor did their part well, but it was not until March, 1861, that the whole of the cost of the Tabernacle was realized, reaching to £31,332 4s. 10d., so that the building was free of debt.

It was a noble pile, not devoid of beauty, though utility was the first consideration. It was 146 feet in length, 81 in width, and 68 in height. There were 5,500 sittings, and room for 500 more persons without

crowding. Below was a lecture hall, seating nearly 1,000, a school room for 1,000 children, and several class rooms, in addition to which were rooms for working meetings, Bible classes, and secretary's offices, with three vestries for Pastor, deacons, and elders.

No one can sum up the amount of work that has been done for God in what has been for thirty-seven years a hive of busy workers, and God only knows what thousands and tens of thousands of souls have been saved and otherwise blessed by the sermons that have gone forth to the ends of the earth, by hundreds of thousands. But now, indeed and in truth the "holy and beautiful house has been burned up with fire." Thank God! the church has not been burned up, and we doubt not both it, and its various missions, will be perpetuated for generations.

The massive walls of the building are still standing, but within all is ruin and devastation. Tons of blackened timber lie about, or hang from the walls or other supports, *debris* of every conceivable thing for all sorts of uses in the work of the church strew the blackened floor, while from what remains of the massive portico one looks upon a sight never to be forgotten. The aged worshippers will mourn their loss, and weep over the ashes of their world renowned Tabernacle. But weeping will not save us in any sense. There must be trust, and prayer, and work.

The rebuilding will be proceeded with as promptly as possible, and much money will be required. The insurances will by no means cover the cost. There will be need for large and prompt liberality. Letters of sympathy have poured in upon the Pastor, some of them containing cheques, and no doubt, God will incline others to give.

The *Echo* has started a shilling subscription list, the *Christian Herald* is receiving contributions, the *British Weekly* will open its columns for help, and we doubt not, others will follow. But to make it most effectual, it should be prompt. Therefore, we beg all intending subscribers to send the practical expressions of their sympathy forthwith to

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Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at [www.spurgeongems.org](http://www.spurgeongems.org).